

A SHORT
INTRODUCTION
TO AN
INQUIRY
INTO THE
PRESENT STATE
OF THE
BODIES ELECTIVE
OF THE
PEOPLES PART
OF THE
LEGISLATURE.

L O N D O N:

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INTRODUCTION

INQUIRY INTO THE PRESENT STATE OF THE BODIES ELECTIVE OF THE

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IT appears to be a general conclusion drawn from the History of the Ages that are past, that a Government, composed of a Chief or King, of a Senate or Nobles, and of a Body Representative of the People, is the most likely to promote the general Welfare of a Nation: and so long as such a mixed form of Government retains within itself the equal Balance of its Powers, it affords the greatest Security to all Ranks of the State.

It is unnecessary to call upon the authority of history for the support of a truth so generally allowed, and established upon so sure a foundation, by the Experience of Mankind. Indeed this form of Government is so happily adapted to the common Necessities of Men in every Country, that it appears to deserve the preference to all others, in reason and the nature of things: for what can tend so effectually to secure the Peace and Property of the Subjects, as to have a third part of the Power of the Government under which they live, vested in

the hands of Men chosen from amongst the People at large? whose Feelings and Necessities must ever breathe through Representatives who hold the same rank in society with themselves, and must mutually partake of the Good or Evil to which the whole are exposed.

IN the next place, to have the second Branch of a Government composed of Nobles, who have acquired large Possessions, or descended from Ancestors with great Inheritances, pledged upon the common safety of the People, who alone can defend them.

AND thirdly, to have a King to resort to upon the Appearance of Danger or Invasions from Abroad, and vested with the executive Power of the Laws at Home, for the Security and Protection of the general Rights and Properties of his Subjects; whose Riches are his best Treasury, and whose Strength is his Power.

A Government composed of these three Branches, and each of them maintained in the due Exercise of their Authority and Privileges, seems to promise to a State all the Advantages that can be derived from Civil Society.

BUT this form of Government stands not in need of the pangenyrick of so unskilful a Commentator, to recommend it to the esteem of a People whose Ancestors raised the noble Fabrick, by Labour, Wisdom and Virtue; and transmitted the invaluable inheritance to their posterity, sealed with their Blood. And succeeding Generations have found, that those who made this sacrifice, did not do it with more Zeal than Knowledge of its worth. The Wealth, Power and Greatness, to which this Nation hath arisen, are so many proofs of the justness of their estimation.

mation for that form of Government, which has been the Instrument of so numerous a train of Advantages to the Subjects of it, that makes it eminently deserve the appellation we give it, of our *happy Constitution*: from which we enjoy Protection to our Property; Freedom to our Persons; and Liberty of Conscience. And every considerate Subject sees, that the Legislative Authority, through which he hath received these Benefits, stands unimpaired, in all its outward forms to secure their continuance.

BUT when we see Poverty increasing, by very perceptible degrees, amongst the great Body of the People, it naturally leads us to inquire into the Cause of so much Distress, in a Country blessed with such an Abundance of all the Necessaries of Life.

THE last Harvest may indeed, have yielded a less Increase than that of former Years, but many scarcer Seasons have been known, without being followed by that general Degree of Misery, which now prevails amongst those who live by the Labour of their Hands, throughout the whole Kingdom.

It is true, that Luxury may demand a numerous Breed of Horses, that consume a large proportion of the Grain that is grown: and it is reasonable to suppose, that they who cultivate the Ground, will give the most attention to that which returns the best reward to their Labour; and Horses being an article little subject to the Burden of Tythes, the temptation to breed them is increased by a double motive of Advantage.

It may likewise be true, that Farms being enlarged, and People crowding together into Towns, may make them consume more, or, what amounts to the same thing, raise no part of the Provisions for their own Support.

THE Still may also turn its Thousands into Liquid-fire; and many other Causes may concur to consume the Quantity of Grain and increase the Price of the Poor Man's Bread; but, could he buy a Peck of Wheat for a Penny, if he knows not where to find Wages for the Work of his Hands, he soon becomes as destitute of Pence as he is of Pounds, to purchase the Necessaries of Life.

It would here be of no use to go back and shew at what Time the Difficulties amongst the Middling and Lower Orders of the State began to increase like a Flood. It is the knowledge of to-day that is most worthy of the Public Attention; and it here requires no evidence to prove, the present unhappy situation of the greatest part of those who form the Bulk, as well as the Strength of the Nation: for wherever we turn our eyes, whether in Town or Country; Distress and Wretchedness (unknown to the Fathers of this Generation) appear without a Covering.

THE Deficiency of the last Year's Harvest; the Increase of Horses; enlarging of Farms; distilling of Grain, and the destroying Hand of Luxury, may all contribute to the general Necessity. But thanks be to the Almighty, our Land is not yet become unfruitful; it is still watered with the Dew of Heaven! and as to the rest, the Mischief they do, floats upon the surface: Horses, Farms and Stills may be discouraged and prohibited by the hand of the Legislature: and the noble Contempt with which the Genius of the People of this Land looks down on Silken-sloth, will soon put the whole Tribe of Luxury out of Countenance, whenever any Public Cause draws the Line between the genuine Sons of Britain, and this feeble Race, whom Vice and Folly hath transplanted to a soil unnatural to their growth:

We must look much higher than these partial Causes; we discover from whence the general Distress proceeds; and it will be well if we do not find the Legislature itself, to be the Fountain that hath sent forth those bitter waters, that hath overflowed this Land of natural Plenty; and the immense Revenue annually levied upon the Subjects at large, to be the true Cause that hath reduced the many to Poverty and Want, and raised the few to a state of Opulence and Profusion.

THE Public Taxes insinuate themselves into every Necessary of Life, and all the Articles of Commerce; and the Manufactures of our Country are now so far advanced in Price above the level of neighbouring Nations, that a very great Proportion of those Branches which used to flourish amongst us, are either greatly contracted or entirely at a stand; by which means our Merchants are incumbered, our Manufacturers distressed, and the labouring People rendered miserable and wretched.

CERTAIN it is, that Causes so general in their influence, have not been the growth of a Season: their fatal Effects have approached, by regular degrees, for a course of years, till at length they have now become insupportable to the People: and the Debt and Charges of Government have accumulated to an height, that the ablest Administration hath the utmost difficulty in finding ways and means to pay the Interest due to the Creditors of the State, and the Wages and Pensions given to the Servants and Dependants of the Crown, the amount whereof is such as must continue to produce the most Ruinous consequences to the Interests of Society. As the Millions collected through the different Branches of the Revenue, are regularly transferred from the Subjects in general, to the Great and Opulent;

lent; and hereby increasing Luxury, a double edge is made to destroy the Peoples wealth and commerce.

WHEN we consider that no Taxes are imposed upon the Subjects, but by Deputies chosen by themselves; and when we see an industrious People blest with all the means of Plenty and of Wealth, yearly sinking deeper and deeper into Poverty and Misery, it is certainly a very excusable motive in all who wish well to the interests of Humanity or their Country, to inquire how so many Evils can have arisen to a People merely from the Burdens laid upon them by their own Representatives. At first sight every moderate man is ready to conclude there is no such paradox, as that the Majority of an Assembly chosen by the People, should *not* speak the Language and feel the Difficulties of those from whom they are sent. And it certainly does appear strange, to see the People of a Country sinking into ruin, by the weight of a Load which none but those they Elect can lay upon their Shoulders.

THE very sound of this proposition excites our curiosity to examine the Balance formed by the Constitution. It is almost needless to explain this Term, as it is at once conceived by considering what the nature of a Balance is. First, the Part which is held together with the Hand that holds it, and then the two Scales with whatever is placed therein.

THE Hand that holds the Balance *can do no wrong*, and happily for us, he who holds it at present shews that he only wishes to do it for the good of his People! The weight in the Scale of the Nobles, we know, is opposed by its full counterpoise in that of the Commons; and as to the active Power of those who are in possession of the Reins of Administration,

nistration, they are amenable to the standing Laws of their Country for the use they make of them, and cannot in any wise affect the Property of the Subject, but through the medium of the Commons Elected: so that the whole object of the Peoples Attention rests solely with their own Representatives; and all the Sufferings of the People are reduced to one single Branch of the Votes of their Assembly—that part of them which are made to *fasten upon Property*, which includes in its Consequences all the Evils the People labour under. Money being the Symbol of all our Temporal Wants, whatever deprives Men of this, in a greater degree than their Circumstances can afford, or their Industry supply, produces, at one stroke, all the Miseries in which we now see such Multitudes involved: and as the Power of imposing Taxes remains alone in the Possession of the Representatives of the People, the present Distress arising from the amount of those Burdens, may make the weakest Attempt to inquire into the true State of the Peoples Part of the Legislature, to be received with Indulgence by the Friends of Humanity, and the Lovers of their Country.

THE Elective Bodies, formed by the Constitution, seem originally to have comprehended the greatest part of the Nation, by having allowed to all the Inhabitants of the several districts, the Right of Voting at the Election of a Representative, except such as were in so mean a situation as to be deemed to have no will of their own. And as the Inhabitants of every particular Town and County are the best acquainted with their own wants and interests, as also of judging who is the fittest Person to represent them; and such ample provision having been made by the Laws

for

for securing to the People the exercise of these Rights, that it was ever to be expected that the Voice of the Commons Elected would be the Voice of the People at large; and we need not turn very far back in the History of our Country, till we find that this was truly the case. But if we run our eye down to the first Reign after the Revolution, notwithstanding the many Laws then made in favour of public Liberty, we may probably discover that the difficulty with which the genuine Representatives of a free People, were brought to impose Burthens upon themselves and their Constituents, (for the Prosecution of Objects wherein the general Good appeared distant or doubtful in its nature,) induced the sagacious WILLIAM to lay the Foundation for softening the inflexible spirit of an honest Representation of the People, and securing their future compliance with the measures of a Court.

SUCCESSING Reigns hath reduced to System what he began; till at length the Voice of a standing Majority of the Commons Elected; hath been brought into perfect unison with Ministers of State; and under all the Changes of public Administration our Memories can trace, we find the Majority of the Peoples Representatives faithful to the Leader for the Day; and in all the Zeal of Parties, in Political Controversy, the gaining Side hath been uniform in voting the Supplies required of them; and we are no longer left to wonder at the paradox of the Commons Elected imposing the enormous Burthen of annual Millions upon the Commons Represented; as a Majority of the former are now to be found amongst the Servants and Dependants of the other Branches of the Legislature; and we may learn from good Authority what to expect from those who serve two Masters.

THE House of Commons may be said to represent the whole Nation; for the Sovereign who is the Head, in his Legislative Authority only acts for himself and for what is called the Prerogative. The Peers meet in Parliament for the security of their own Rights: the Bishops do the same. But the House of Commons assemble in behalf of the People, who are to the King as Eight Millions are to a Unit, and to the Bishops and Peers as Eight Millions to Two Hundred; therefore Eight Millions of free Citizens are represented by the House of Commons. And when the time arrives that returns to the People their Right of Election, the Severity of their Sufferings, under the Weight of the Burthens laid upon them by their own Representatives, may teach them Wisdom, and make them more careful than they or their Fathers have been, in the choice of those to whom they resign such Power over themselves and their Property.

COULD I have persuaded myself that this would be the case, and that the Right of Electing the Majority of the House of Commons, would return even once in seven Years, to any considerable proportion of the People at large, they would have been left to judge of their own situation, and so weak an Advocate would not have appeared in so great a Cause.

THE appellation of *the Rotten Part of the Constitution*, given by a great Statesman a few years ago, first led me to attend to the situation of the Elective Bodies; as they have occasionally come under my observation in different parts of the Kingdom, and the evidence that has arisen obliges me to believe, that the Right of Election has not been in the possession of a great proportion of the Elective Bodies established by the Constitution, for several years past.

EVERY separate Case admits of distinct Evidence. But in general as far as my information has gone, it appears that many of those Bodies, who formerly were in possession of the Right of Election, are totally cut off, and the proof of the Facts are such, as to put the matter out of all doubt, that the People have not there any greater share in constituting the House of Commons, than they have in that of the Peers. And instead of the Right of Election remaining with the People as intended by the Constitution; a single individual is in possession of that Right, and transfers it at his pleasure. In some places, the Forms of Election are indeed preserved with more outward respect to the original Institution than in others, but the Thing itself is the same, the Electors are nominated by Him to whom the Majority of the Freehold or Borough belongs, and where the Proprietor himself is not returned, the Member sent to Parliament takes his Seat either by Purchase or Favour, where the idea of responsibility to his Constituents can never occur to his imagination, as they are Created and Expire in the week of his Election, and leave him perfectly at liberty to raise his own or the Interest of his Family at the expence of his Country.

THE Season is now not very distant, when the formation of the Peoples Part of the Legislature must be again in the Hands of those to whom the Right of Election belongs; and it is from them that the future Disposers of the Peoples Property will soon originate; therefore by a timely discovery of their true situation, a just conclusion may be made, whether there can be any well grounded expectation of relief, from the Majority of any future Assembly, that may be constituted by the Elective Bodies as they now stand. These consist of,

40 Counties

40 Counties in England which send to Parliament 80 Knights.

24 Cities ——— 50 Citizens.

2 Universities ——— 4 Representatives.

12 Counties in Wales ——— 12 Knights.

33 Shires in Scotland ——— 30 Knights.

111 Elective Bodies ——— 176 Members.

BUT 33 Shires in Scotland sending only 30 Members, they ought to be considered only as 30 Elective Bodies, this leaves the number 108.

167 Boroughs in England, send two each 334 Burgeffes.

5 ——— one each 5 ———

8 Cinque Ports and their three dependents 16 Barons.

12 Boroughs in Wales ——— 12 Burgeffes.

67 Boroughs in Scotland ——— 15 ———

259 Elective Bodies ——— 382 Members.

BUT 67 Boroughs in Scotland sending only 15 Members, they ought to be considered only as 15 Elective Bodies, this leaves their number 207.

108 Counties and Cities are represented by 176 Members.

207 Boroughs and Cinque Ports ——— by 382 Members.

315 Elective Bodies, which constitute 558 Representatives

or the House of Commons; and as the Majority thereof is 280,

were every Member of the Assembly always in his place, if it

be found, upon bringing together the Evidence of the real State of

the Elective Bodies, that there are 140 which send two Members

each, that are separately held as the private property of an Indi-

vidual, or under the absolute disposal of a single Person, or a Fa-

mily; it will then be demonstrable, that the Legislative Voice of

the Commons of this Land is not in the possession of the People,

as intended by the Constitution. But on the contrary, their Laws are made, and their Taxes imposed by a Legislature, in which they have no share. And as it is from those who possess the Elective Voice that the Representative must ever proceed, no frequency of Election can restore to the People their lost Weight in the Balance of the Legislature. And so long as the Majority of the Body Representative continues to be constituted and governed by an influence, independant of the Voice of the People, there can be no well grounded hope of relief from any oppressions under which the great Body of the Subjects labour; and were we to suppose, that nothing but Virtue and Publick-Spirit, breathed through the Electors in all the Counties and Cities, and that every one of their future Representatives was a Shippen, or a Savile, it cannot avail them, as the Majority of the Assembly form the Peoples Part of the Legislature.

THIS very imperfect introduction is addressed to all those who are not in pursuit of the rewards held out by the Executive Part of the Government, at the Expence of a distressed People; and if these considerations appear to be well founded it is greatly to be desired that they would unite themselves into a Society, to enquire into the present state of the Bodies Elective of the Peoples part of the Legislature, and to assist the Laws of the Land in doing justice to those that may be found Parties in betraying the plain design of the Constitution; for surely the Man who counterfeits our Coin is innocent compared with him, who, contrary to the Laws, assists by Art or Evasion in forming a Body, that possesses the Power of disposing of the whole Property of the People.

AND should the important design of restoring to the People their Legal Weight in the Legislature be pursued by the Friends of
their

their Country, their united aid can never be more necessary than at the present distance from a General Election; and whilst we are blest with a King, who from the commencement of his Reign shewed his Subjects should be governed by no power Superior to their Laws, and therefore He made the Judges of the Land independent of Himself. A People favoured with so good a Prince, and in possession of such excellent Laws, would be greatly wanting to themselves and their Posterity, if they do not pursue their endeavours to remove the oppressive power of an Aristocratical Body, whose Interests equally tend to comprhol the Authority of the Sovereign, and command the property of the People without their consent. And so long as the Legislative and Executive Powers are united together by the same Interest, there can be no Legal Liberty; because the same Senate that enacts a tyrannical Law, may agree to execute it in a tyrannical manner.

TRUE it is that all human things have an end, and it has been said that this State will lose its Liberty, will Perish. Have not Rome, Sparta, and Carthage perished? British Liberty will Perish when the Legislative Power shall be more corrupt than the Executive. And if Tyranny is let in, by which Door of the three it entered, it matters not. And the exercise of Tyranny and Usurpation in a State are by no means confined to any number.

BUT old age is unknown to the Body-Politic, and there never exists a moment that admits of no hope of its recovery.

If the Facts already collected, were sufficient to shew that no new Election can restore to the People their choice of the Majority of the House of Commons, this is neither the time or place to advance them, and it is as unnecessary as it would be useless to produce the plainest Evidence, till a Society be formed of Men both able and independent; and if a respectable meeting for

the purpose once takes place in London; and an establishment made under the management of a Committee appointed by that meeting; there is no doubt but information and support would flow into the Society, from every part of the Kingdom, and in a short time the Friends of their Country might be enabled to approach the Throne of their King, and lay at his feet the evidence to prove that the Voice of his Parliament is not the Voice of his People; and the Society may receive the Royal approbation in aiding the Laws of the Land, to restore to the People their lost weight in the Legislature; and St. Stephen's sacred walls may not again be heard to resound with loud jollity, whilst the People there supposed to be assembled, weep, faint, and die under the oppressive load laid upon them by their own Representatives. And if the Laws of the Land can be so effectually supported by the permanent assistance of a Society, as to restore the Right of Election to those whom it was the design of the Constitution it should for ever belong, then the Sovereign in attending to the Voice of his Parliament will hear the Voice of his People, and the benevolence of his nature will shrink with horror, at the information he receives from his truly Elected and Faithful Commons of all that misery and wretchedness under which the great Body of his Subjects now labour in every part of Great Britain and Ireland. His Royal bounty will then contract itself, and were it possible to continue the present supplies, he will no longer allow the Blood of his People to purchase the Splendour of his Servants; and when the abundance of their reward is once reduced to the limits of Equity, the temptation to betray the Elective Voice of the People will die away, and the Sovereign will find few or no Men of Principle and Abilities, contending for the honour of his Service.



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